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Who Am I ? - September 12, 2021

Mark : 27-30 - Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

Scripture: Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “**Who do people say I am?**” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “**Who do you say I am?**” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Reflection: I remember one time before the pandemic when I was doing the Friday service at the Mission. When I do my services on Fridays I often dress down, usually wearing jeans and sneakers and a t-shirt. But on this particular Friday we had a new group of people serving lunch in the kitchen.

After my service one lady approached me and expressed how impressed she was with me, and that it was great that they were allowing the folks at the Mission to do the church services themselves. I realized that she had mistaken me for one of the members there. I responded by telling her that we’re all able.

She must have mentioned me to one of the kitchen staff afterwards, I saw them talking through the window as I was having my lunch. But his

response made her look back at me in shock and total embarrassment. I'm pretty sure he told her I was one of the chaplains.

People form their own impressions of others all the time, and based on a variety of things. How we speak, our manners, our appearance, our disposition, possibly where we live or the car we drive. We all do it. And it's not such a bad thing. Those impressions inform our instincts, and oftentimes it's our instincts that keep us safe, or help us to busily lifelong associations or friendships.

Today in our scripture Jesus is asking his disciples 'what impression do the people have of me?' What do they think of me? Who do they say that I am? Rev. Brian Williams, a Methodist minister in Michigan, wrote that Jesus' question was like a marketing question: What is my image out there?

But the responses from the disciples were pretty interesting. One of the disciples says, people think that you're Elijah. Elijah of the Old Testament was known to be a miracle worker, and it was easy to see how the people would think that Elijah had come back among them, based on all the miraculous things Jesus was doing.

Then one of the other disciples said well, they say that you are John the Baptist who has returned to us. The people revered John who was preaching about the necessity of returning to God, and being one with God. Jesus was also preaching similar things, but went a step further.

Jesus was bringing God to the people, bringing God among the people, and helping the people to realize that God was not some far out, distant entity, God was already among them, and God's kingdom had already begun.

Then one of the other disciples said, in response to Jesus' question: "People think you're one of the prophets". They remember the stories

of old of the prophets' wisdom and ability to see into the future, and based on all the wisdom you have shared, the people think that you must be a prophet. But then Jesus approached the question from a different angle. He asked: "But who do you say that I am?" That's almost a loaded question.

I wonder if we asked people that question, what would the responses be, and whether or not the responses would surprise us. Wouldn't it be interesting to know? And depending on who you asked, the answers might be vastly different. Who your husband or wife says that you are, would be different than who your kids say that you are, or who your siblings say that you are, or who your friends say that you are, or who the person you volunteer with say that you are... Wouldn't it be fascinating to know who the people around you say that you are?

In April my friend and homechurch minister Paul turned 65 and his wife messaged around to all the people closest to him for us to send a little video of best wishes, seeing as there couldn't be a party because of Covid. She got a friend to put it all together and on the night of his birthday after dinner, she played him the video.

We spoke afterwards and he was telling me how he wept throughout the video. We all shared with him who we thought that he was. He said it was like watching his own funeral, listening to his own beautiful eulogy, and he was taken aback by who the people around him say that he was.

But that's the thing, isn't it? We often share the way we feel about the people we love at their funerals. It's interesting to know that this biblical event is referred to as 'The confession at Caesarea Philippi', and right after this conversation Jesus shared with his disciples that he was going to be executed.

Jesus asked his friends : 'And who do you say that I am?' For this round of questioning, only Peter had the guts to respond. He said, "Jesus, you

are the Christ. You're not just any prophet. You are not simply a person in the Bible who has come back again. You are the Messiah."

Of course, Peter couldn't have been totally sure of the whole picture of who Jesus was. It's Jesus' death and resurrection that gives us a clearer picture of who he was, and that hadn't occurred yet. So Peter gave a response based on who he wanted Jesus to be.

And don't we do that today? We try to recreate Christ the way we want Christ to be, because that's so much easier. Different church Denominations pick and choose the Jesus that makes the most sense to their doctrines. And we do it too based on the things that we believe as individuals.

Jesus says love your neighbor as yourself, and we ask: Exactly as ourselves, but they are loud and obnoxious, and they use drugs and drink too much.. Jesus I love you, but I can't love these people...

And Jesus responds... But that's who I am...

Jesus says: "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." And we say, but Jesus, I could never forgive this person who has hurt me, who has said such horrid things about me, who hasn't come and humbled themselves before me.... I love you Jesus but I can't forgive them...

And Jesus responds: But that's who I am...

Jesus says: "If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which has gone astray? And we say, Jesus how could you leave us and go look for those people ? They're not like us, if they're lost it's their own damn fault.

No one told them to be drug addicts, or transsexual , it's not our fault that they're refugees, or dealing with generational trauma. It's not our

fault that they can't get their lives together, and they can't be a part of your kingdom with us unless they get their act together.

And Jesus responds... That's who I am....

We come together to worship, to worship God, to learn more about Jesus, to use those learnings so that we may be better people for ourselves and to the people around us. Today we ask 'Who do you say Jesus is? Who do you say you are? How close is your description of Jesus to your description of yourself? How can you be more like Jesus?

It's the question I would like you to ponder today and this week. How can I be more like Jesus... It's a work in progress. To become more like Jesus is a journey... that I hope we'll take in sincerity and with intentionality.... Thanks be to God.. Amen..

Prayer:

This morning, as we take a moment to think of that question that Jesus asks of his disciples, and that Jesus continues to ask of us today, "Who do you say that I am?", we also ask how can we be more like the person we think Jesus is...

We pray dear God to open our hearts to be more like Jesus.. We pray that like him we are able to love openly and freely and without reservations and conditions, so that if we ever asked anyone 'who do you say That I am' their answers would be pleasing to you.

We pray for each other today dear God. We pray for our elderly, our sick and our shut ins..... We pray for those who hold a place in our minds and hearts at this time...

We pray for our world as we continue to grapple with this awful pandemic. We pray for our persecuted scientists and our exhausted health practitioners. We pray for our frontline workers who are taking the brunt of anger from the public. Strengthen them oh God... We pray

for our country as we approach our general election, we join with the world church in our prayers for the countries of Ghana and Nigeria.

We bring all these prayers to you dear God... in the name of the one who asks 'Who do you say that I am?' Who taught us to pray.....